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## American Art Journal.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 1866.

HENRY C. WATSON.....EDITOR.

HOWARD HINTON.....ASSOCIATE EDITOR.

PUBLICATION OFFICE, 806 BROADWAY.

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## MODERN ART AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY.

Comparing the present exhibition of the Academy with that of last year, it is encouraging to observe a steady advance in the direction of Nature. As the new *isms* in Medicine, while openly combatted, are, to some extent, clandestinely incorporated into the practice of the old schools, so the new views in Art are silently distilled, drop by drop, into the traditional methods. The tendency of landscape Art, indeed of all Art, is toward a more positive treatment.

We use the word *positive* in the Comtean sense. Without adopting all the conclusions of the Positive Philosophy, we are nevertheless persuaded that its fundamental statement gives the key-note of all the progressive tendencies of the Age. Applying Comte's law of development to Art, religious Art subordinated Nature and Law to the divine impersonations of the imagination; metaphysical Art erected certain abstractions, misnamed idealizations, converting Nature to a lifeless corse; while positive Art regards Nature as the Great Fact—an infinite web of relations, embracing in one whole all the phenomena of sense, all the phenomena of thought, the ramifications of an inexorable Law.

Of these three epochs, the first is one of genuine Art,—it is an epoch of spontaneity of imagination,—there is no separation of substance from form; the second is *in itself*, one of false Art, but as it is a transition epoch, its art-products are mixed in characters retaining, often, some of the vitality of the past, giving sometimes a premonition of the future,—it is, in general, one of mere ornamentation or unreal beauty,—substance is then separated from form; the third is an epoch of advance to Nature.

We admit that the statement of the Positive Philosophy does not, at the first glance, seem favorable to the enthusiasm of true Art. It is because Nature as a system of relations is regarded, perhaps even by the followers of Comte, objectively, whereby mere relations are, covertly, made into entities. But this Philosophy is then only consistent with itself, when an identity is established between nature and soul, finite and infinite; nature as a system of relations is not thus a cold object of thought, but the infinitely varying and procreative form of that Life, whose omniformity centers in man. Nature, therefore, everywhere glows and palpitates with this Life; every part is sacred, every part is an evolution of this common force; the human circulatory system is ramified throughout the whole; all grows from the heart of man. This then is the philosophy of a true idealism, which always identifies substance with form, in contradistinction to false idealism, which, by barren generalizations, makes form representative only.

The worship of nature, flowing from the spirit of this philosophy, is not a sentimentalism, it is not the mere awe felt before the manifestations of an unknown power, it is not the sensuous admiration of varying effects and picturesque conformations; it is a loving self-sur-

render, a self-identification, not with nature as an objective mass—a low materialism, but with nature as a plastic spirit which is ever individualizing itself in new forms—a genuine spiritualism;

We do not mean to say that the artists, in whom this spirit appears, have received their direction from a course of philosophic study. The artist works spontaneously, he *unconsciously* gives expression to the tendencies of his times; it is in virtue of this spontaneity that he is an artist, the analysis of his motive is an afterthought. His genius receives its direction from that creative spirit whose law is evolution. The workings of this spirit supply the condition at once of the analysis of the thinker and the synthesis of the artist. The philosopher and the artist are, in their order of evolution, independent if not contemporaneous.

## NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN.

## SECOND ARTICLE.

Among the artists represented in the Exhibition of the Academy, who give expression to the new tendencies, whose hearts seem to be inspired and hands guided by a more scientific and yet profounder and more poetic love of nature than belongs to that art which owes its origin and direction to the *renaissance*, a prominent, if not the most conspicuous place, must be assigned to C. C. Griswold.

Mr. Griswold is especially felicitous—poetic, we would better say—in seizing those quiet, expectant moments of nature when some change impends, or is almost imperceptibly drawing on. He is, therefore, appropriately ranked as the herald of the incoming of the new spirit in art.

Our readers will remember his picture in the last Exhibition of the Academy in which he suggested with great refinement of feeling, the stealthy approaches of the first sunlight. It imparted a feeling of expectancy—of sublime premonition.

His picture of the present Exhibition, though differing wholly in subject, seizes a similar moment of transition. This time it is the passage from winter to spring—the breaking up of the old, the pause of expectancy, the anticipation of the new life soon to burst forth. The artist finely chooses a bend in the river, similar to the opening of the Highlands of the Hudson, where spurs of the hills, overlapping from each side, shut off the distance. Behind these fortresses we imagine the season is gathering strength to shake off the last hold of winter. His foot is yet upon the stream. The ice, it is true, has broken up; only a few cakes of it cling to the shores and the low island in the foreground—but there is an icy calmness in the unbroken surface of the water. A cold, gray mist covers river and mountain, but it is so graduated that the observer feels that it will soon lift, that it now only veils for the moment the secret departure of winter, that life and motion are preparing in some mysterious recesses. This poetry of suggestion does not interfere with, nay grows out of a truthfulness and sincerity of detail which must command the respect of all.

In indicating that quality which is common to this picture with the "Sunrise" of last year's exhibition, we would not be understood as suspecting Mr. Griswold of falling into a same-

ness of manner. The pictures are kindred in spiritual quality, but have none of that superficial mannerism of effect, which is repeated to satiety by so many of our older artists. His pure love and close study of nature will preserve him from such fatal mishap.

The most imposing picture of the Exhibition, in respect of both subject and size, is Gignoux's "Glimpse of Mt. Blanc."

It is seldom that an artist succeeds in imparting that awe-inspired feeling which the observer is supposed to feel when standing before vast mountain forms. The loveliness of the distant hills with their veils of mist, their robe of blue air, their floating cloud-shadows, their glow of molten sunlight, often receives appreciative expression; but the majesty of the seemingly near mountains, heaving and struggling upward, withstands the direct attack of the landscapist; he can attain somewhat of it only by bringing to his aid some device of the imagination, achieving through suggestion what an undisguised handling will not effect. To a device of this kind Mr. Gignoux has resorted in this picture. He awakens the feeling of height by the contrasted suggestion of depth. In the foreground opens a mountain chasm, whose gloomy depths the eye cannot penetrate; in the background, almost in a line with this abyss, rises the snowy front of Mt. Blanc. The observer feels that he is already high up above the common plane of earth, but the heights before him carry sight and thought still on toward the unattainable.

But while we freely acknowledge the power the artist has shown in this treatment of his subject, we cannot so fully yield our admiration to the execution. The impressiveness of the whole would, in our opinion, have been immeasurably enhanced, if the artist had condescended to a carefulness of touch, at once stronger and more refined. Take the foreground. The rocky masses that define the chasm—how they are lacking in the grit and durability of God's masonry! The shadows that cover, or should cower, in this abyss—how flat and dead! how devoid of all terror to the observer! These heavy splashes of foliage—how would the delicacy of true leafage, in their stead, with its grace of detail, have added by contrast to the rudeness and ruggedness and terror of these heights. We object also to the sharp, raw manner with which the plateau at the base of the mountain is painted.

But while thus strongly stating what, from our point of view, appear as defects in this picture, we repeat our acknowledgment of its general power, and only regret that an artist who displays so much of genuine strength, will not consent to abandon that slovenliness, shall we call it?—which is so often mistaken for masterliness.

#### ACADEMY OF MUSIC—ITALIAN OPERA.

Mr. Grau's Italian Opera season commenced last Monday evening, at the Academy of Music, under rather unfavorable circumstances. The attendance was not very large, and severely critical—in most part disposed to expect a degree of excellence that should equal, if not excel all precedent. We regret to say that such anticipations were not realized, for neither soprano nor tenor approached the high standard which that public had raised, and the baritone alone satisfied moderate expectation from operatic *habitués*. The performance of "La Traviata" was, in general, very inferior to even moderate demands for high class opera. Orchestra and chorus were only tolerable at

their best, and too often faulty in the extreme, as if not well informed of their duty. Boschetti looks well, and has some idea of stage effect, but possesses very slight qualification for a prima donna beyond that endowment, either in voice, culture, or execution of the music given her to interpret. Her best points were made in the duets with Germond and Alfredo—in the last act. Signor Anastasi disappointed those who hoped for a sweet and effective *tenore di grazia*, as he was rarely audible, and when heard in concerted music, not remarkably well in tune. Signor Orlandini afforded in the passages with Alfredo in "Di Provenza" high gratification, his really good baritone, pleasing style and good method cheering disconsolate amateurs in quest of a new operatic sensation.

On this evening "Il Trovatore" will introduce to a New York public, Madames Noel Guidi and Cash Polini, with the well-known dramatic tenor, Mossiani, when we hope to record better results and accord that unqualified praise which regard for truth compels us to deny to the opening performance of Mr. Grau's Opera Company in our Academy.

#### CONCERTS.

##### NEW YORK MENDELSSOHN UNION.

The Fourth Soiree of this Society was given at Dodworth's Hall, on Thursday evening. A much needed reform has been made in the arrangement of this Hall, by removing the platform from the side to the end. By this change the convenience of the audience is consulted and the music is heard to far better advantage. The programme was of a light and miscellaneous character, commencing with Macfarren's Cantata, "The May Queen," with Misses Simms, and Hostin, and Mrs. Eddy and Walker as soloists, who performed their parts well, the ladies especially. Miss Simms is always excellent in such music. Miss Hostin is rarely heard in solo, but her voice and performance of the brief solo allotted her, were so pleasing and satisfactory, that we regret more opportunity is not afforded her of proving how excellent a singer she is. Miss Mayer sang Hammel's Tyrolienne in a most pleasing and artistic manner. This is a most promising young contralto. Miss Libby Smith exhibits much promise, but her choice of a song is far too ambitious for her present accomplishments.

Miss Simms made a like mistake in attempting "Let the Bright Seraphim," although she fell less palpably short of the high mark arrived at than Miss Smith unfortunately did. "Ernani involami," and "Let the Bright Seraphim," are pieces to be conquered only by artists, or by accomplished and thoroughly finished amateurs. She would have effected a much greater success in songs better suited to her capacity.

Mr. L. P. Thatcher sang Meyerbeer's "Pastorelli" from "Le Prophete" admirably, his voice and style assimilating to its character and expression, while he executed the music with exceeding taste and smoothness. He never has sung as well, in our hearing, as then.

The choral performance was good, some parts very good, although more voices were necessary to make them impressive, with all the strong contrasts of light and shade. The deficiency was not so apparent in the lighter choruses, but when Mendelssohn's "Rise up, Arise" came up for execution, the director saw but forty singers in their seats, and turning round to the audience, called the recreant

choristers back to their duty. Being thus publicly rebuked, most of the absent singers went back from the audience to the orchestra. But the conductor still waited, amid general wonder, for, as it proved, one unfortunate absentee, who was finally compelled to emerge from the retiring hall, and walk up to his seat on the stage, heralded by shouts of laughter and thunders of applause. The culprit proved to be no less a personage than the President of the Society, who had always been emphatic in condemning those absents themselves from choral duty. The laugh was against him this time, but he bore it well.

The most successful choral performance was the "Ave Maria" from Wallace's "Lurline," which was charmingly rendered.

##### CONCERT OF MISS NETTIE STERLING.

The complimentary testimonial concert given to Miss Nettie Sterling, at Irving Hall, was one of the most successful entertainments of the season. Every seat on the floor was sold, every standing place was filled, and over 300 holders of tickets could not get into the hall at all. Many holders of seats did not come at all, so their places were left vacant, while many ladies had to stand, and we and three members of the press were especially accommodated with an excellent position just outside the door, where the heat from the room struck us in the face, and the cold from the entrance in the back. It was a position eminently conducive to the formation of an independent position, as the enthusiasm from within was quickly cooled from without, thus preserving a just balance of judgment. There certainly should be some regulation by which weary standers-up should be permitted to occupy seats which are vacant after a certain hour. At concerts, a margin of half an hour to retain the privilege would be amply sufficient, after which they should be free to be occupied, to be given up, of course, if the holders arrive.

Miss Sterling, the beneficeaire, has for some time attracted attention as the contralto of Dr. Adam's Church, where her fine voice tells out with admirable effect. She has been studying for the stage, we believe, with an Italian master, and has made considerable progress in that direction. Her voice is pure and rich in quality through its whole register, with one or two weak notes about A and B, which require careful culture. Her method is good, she sings easily, has much force of expression, and a fair share of abandon. We should judge that her voice is flexible, and that in certain phases it is greatly sympathetic. She sang "Ah! mio figlio," from "Il Profeta," well; it lacked breadth and dramatic expression, but it was a performance of much promise, and won a very enthusiastic encore. The aria with which she responded, she sang most charmingly, and at its close a gentleman appeared on the orchestra, who, after reading a letter from some unknown friend, written in an unknown style and language, presented her with a magnificent gold watch-chain. She afterward sang a very passionate and dramatic song by Robert Goldbeck, who accompanied her, with so much feeling and expression, that she gained a unanimous encore, to which she responded by another passionate and very beautiful love-song by the same composer, in which she created a marked sensation. Her portions in the concerted music she sang admirably, her rich voice adding to and mellowing the general effect. Her debut may be considered a genuine and well-deserved success.

Senorita C. Poch sang very finely. Her ex-